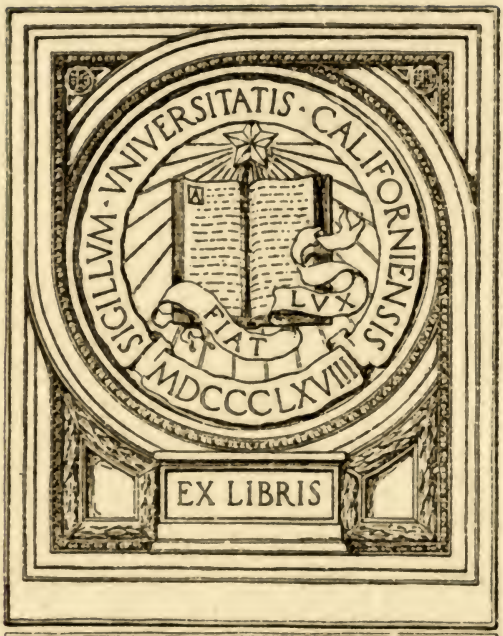
UC-NRLF
$B 56 137

THE NECESSARY EVIL

CHARLES RANN KENNEDY

YC 45643


SIGILLVM · VNIVERSITATIS · CALIFORNIENSIS
FIAT LVX
MDCCCLXVIII
EX LIBRIS

960
K35
n

960

THE NECESSARY EVIL

A ONE-ACT STAGE PLAY FOR FOUR PERSONS: TO BE PLAYED IN THE LIGHT

BY

CHARLES RANN KENNEDY

AUTHOR OF

"THE SERVANT IN THE HOUSE"

God made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions
—Ecclesiastes vii 29

HARPER & BROTHERS PUBLISHERS
NEW YORK AND LONDON
MCMXIII

ALL STAGE, RECITATION, PUBLICATION, TRANSLATION AND OTHER RIGHTS RESERVED. APPLICATION SHOULD BE MADE TO MESSRS. HARPER & BROTHERS

COPYRIGHT, 1913 BY CHARLES RANN KENNEDY

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
PUBLISHED FEBRUARY, 1913
M-M

TO

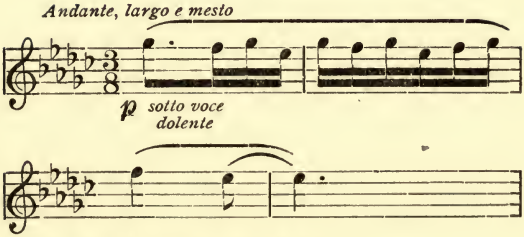
N. A.

"BECAUSE OF YOUR INNOCENCE—YOUR WHITE SOUL. AND THEN ALSO, YOU ARE MY CHILD. NOT ONLY HIS: NOT ONLY YOUR MOTHER'S; BUT MINE: EVERYBODY'S: THE WORLD'S. YES, YOU SHALL BE THAT HENCEFORWARD, DOWN THE DAYS.

"AND THAT IS WHY YOU HAVE HAD TO HEAR THIS TERRIBLE THING."

259891

THE NECESSARY EVIL



BRAHMS: Intermezzo: Op. 118, No. 6

83

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

THE SCENE

The sitting-room in John Heron's house. Almost the first thing to catch the eye is the portrait of a Woman. It is not merely the size of the picture, not even the quality of the painting that attracts attention; but something in the woman herself. Perhaps it is wistfulness, pathos; perhaps a deep, calm understanding; perhaps beauty. She dominates this room like a presence, a spirit, the mother of all the living things it holds.

Of these living things, there are books, music, inexpensive but good engravings, water-colours, all of them there apparently for use and enjoyment, not show. Signs of refinement and limited income, for those who can read the hieroglyphics of a room.

Man is about: pipes, ash-trays, a wholesome smell of tobacco: perhaps also a little disorder. Something feminine, too. Flowers, little nicknacks,

needle-work: things loved, looked after. A straightening-out of chairs and papers from the masculine eccentric. A general air of the Dionysiac rampagings of man slightly limited by some daughter of Apollo.

On the right of the Audience is the Fireplace. A Door leading into the hallway is at the back. On the left is a window looking out upon the street. It is clearly a streety sort of street with lamp-posts, palings, and an "other side" of ordinary-looking houses.

There is a settee, left, toward the front: a piano on the same side at the back, near the window: a writing-desk above the fireplace; and in the centre of the room, a tea-table set for four, the middle of which is occupied by a big Birthday Cake crowned with candles. And other things.

THE LIGHT

The Play commences at sunset, the light of which comes streaming in through the window. Then an interval of gradual darkening into dusk. Then the street lamp outside the window is lighted. After-

wards the gas is turned on in the room. Later, it is lowered, and one birthday candle is lighted. Towards the end of the play, the gas is turned on again.

THE MUSIC

The Overture for this play should be by Brahms: preferably, the Intermezzo, Op. 116, No. 6: played, of course, as written, on the piano. No orchestra. The Intermezzo, Op. 118, No. 6 is employed in the action of the play itself.

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

JOHN HERON
NELLIE: his daughter
FRANK: his son
A WOMAN

THE PLACE

THE SITTING ROOM
AT JOHN HERON'S

THE TIME

NINETEEN HUNDRED
AND TWELVE YEARS
AFTER THE BIRTH OF
OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

THE NECESSARY EVIL

On the rise of the curtain, NELLIE *and* JOHN HERON *are discovered, the girl standing looking out of the open window, and her father busy, quill in hand, over some musical manuscript at the writing-table. He is a man of about fortyfive, well-preserved, hale, hearty, kindly, grey at the temples, and rather timidly gentle in his general movements and ways of speech: something of a wild bull, though, when roused. The girl might be almost any age from seventeen up to twentyfive; but is actually twentyone, this being indeed her birthday, as witness the cake and candles on the tea-table. As she stands there at the window, the last flush of the setting sun about her face and hair, she is very beautiful: childlike, slim, fragile, she looks like a little pale lily, all exquisiteness and pathos.*

JOHN HERON, *absorbed in his manuscript, which he carries with him, goes to the fireplace and bending down lights his pipe with a paper spill.*

NELLIE. Oh, it is all so beautiful, so very beautiful. Why did He make everything so beautiful? And good!

HERON. Yes, I think that abrupt modulation to the dominant is rather . . .
Hm! Coming in just there, too.

NELLIE. Why, whatever are you talking about, Daddy? I'm not thinking about your dear old music. I'm thinking about something else. Something quite as beautiful though. Well . . . almost.

JOHN HERON *pauses in the lighting of his pipe, and turns with a whimsical expression on his face.*

HERON. Why, whatever can that be, Sweetheart?

NELLIE. I'm thinking how beautiful it is to be alive. To be a part of it all. To be a part of all this, out here. Oh, how good everything is!

He crosses over to her, dropping the manuscript on the piano as he passes. He caresses her tenderly.

HERON. My child! My little, precious child!

NELLIE. Daddy, dear!

She unlinks herself. Caresses make her shy.

They stand for a moment or two together, looking thoughtfully out of the window. They are illumined by the sunlight.

Only to think of it! Scarcely a moment ago—why, it only seems like yesterday—and here I was, an invalid, a puny broken little wretch all skin and bones: nothing but a bag of misery with milk and eggs and codliver oil inside it. And then, your poor patient old face!—the care, the sorrow, the perpetual fear lest at any moment. . . Oh, I know what went on in your heart, Daddy dear; though I never let on. And now, to think of it! I'm strong, I'm well again. I'm downstairs! I'm grown up. I'm not even the same person. Something magical has happened this very day. I'm a woman.

HERON. That's a big difference to come about all in one day.

NELLIE (*mysteriously*). Oh, there's a lot of magic can come about all in one day, I can tell you. Only you have to keep your eyes wide open, if you want to see it.

HERON. You! Why, you're only a baby. Not a particle of difference in you that I can see, since the day I wrote my first published song—you know, the cradle song. My *only* published song, to be precise.

NELLIE. Well you know, I'm getting rather a big baby, Father. Oh, I'm in earnest. Things have been happening to me— Yes they have: they have been happening a long time, only you didn't know of it.

HERON. There's nothing you can tell me about yourself, Miss, that I don't know. Oh, I can read you: I can read you like a book.

NELLIE. Daddy, you humbug! You don't even know what's happened to me today.

HERON. Don't I, indeed! I'd like to know the thing that's happened to you today, that I don't . . .

(*With quick alarm.*) You're in love with somebody.

NELLIE (*teasing*). Yes: I'm in love with my dear old Daddy.

HERON. If it's that doctor fellow, I'll wring his impertinent . . .

NELLIE. Nonsense! As if anyone could fall in love with a bottle of codliver oil.

HERON. Then it's that damned little whippersnap of a lawyer. The young . . .! So *that's* why he wanted to take music lessons!

NELLIE. Wrong again. It's not that, either. And Alfred isn't a whippersnap. He's a very nice boy; and I'm going to marry him some day—when he proposes to me.

HERON. Oh, you're perfectly disgraceful! Shame-

less, I call it! Flirt with every single man you . . .

(*Lamely.*) What *has* happened to you today?

NELLIE. I thought you knew.

HERON (*brazenly*). Well, so I do; but I won't say.

NELLIE. Very well then. I needn't tell you.

HERON (*coaxing*). My child! . . .

But he is not to be let off so easily.

NELLIE. Well, say I've won.

HERON. No, I'm damned if I will.

NELLIE. Naughty, naughty! But I really have won, you know.

HERON (*sulky*). Well, I won't say it.

NELLIE. You will, if you want to know. And you do. You're curious. You can't get out of that.

HERON. I won't say it.

NELLIE. Won't say what?

HERON (*not to be caught*). What you want me to say.

NELLIE (*trying other tactics*). Oh do!

HERON. I won't.

NELLIE. Yes.

HERON. No.

NELLIE. You don't love me.

HERON. Who says I don't?

NELLIE. Daddy, darling!

HERON. Very well then. All right.

NELLIE. All right what? Say it.

His manhood oozes out of him. He grunts weakly;

HERON. You've won.

NELLIE. You good obedient angel! Now then, listen! Today, beginning early this morning—before the milkman—before the postman—before you ever thought of getting up—there happened . . .

Oh, but first of all, apologise for what you said about Alfred.

HERON. No, I'll be . . .

But he really cannot go back over the same ground again: so;

Very well, I apologize for what I said about —Alfred.

There is a suspicious emphasis on the name.

NELLIE. "Dear Alfred" Father darling.

HERON (*disgusted*). Oh, *dear* Alfred! Now for goodness sake, quicken up your tempo, and tell me your secret.

NELLIE (*coming in prompt on the beat*). I will! . . . Look over there.

HERON. Where?

NELLIE. There. On the tea-table.
It's been there for one whole mortal hour; and you've never noticed it.

HERON. Well, what is there to look at? I can only see a cake and a lot of ridiculous candles. What about it?

NELLIE. Yes, this comes of choosing a geni-*ous* for a father. One whole hour, and you've never even looked at it. There's music for you! You know, *you* don't deserve to have a daughter's birthday.

HERON (*at sea*). Birthday . . .

NELLIE. I tell you, you begin to feel that sort of neglect when you're twentyone.

HERON. When you're what?

NELLIE. Twentyone.

HERON. *Who's* twentyone?

NELLIE. I am. I've been it all day long. That's the cake.

He stands dumbfounded, looking at it, as if it were a miracle.

HERON. Well, I never! Cake . . . Twentyone . . . *You!*

NELLIE. Um! Yes sir. *Reely.*

HERON. Oh, my precious, how selfish of me. And I never knew: never even dreamed of getting you a . . .

Here, stop a moment though . . .

He begins fumbling importantly at his pocket-book.

NELLIE. No, no, Daddy: I don't want it, really I don't; and you can't afford it.

HERON. Nonsense, nonsense. This is an extra. Why, the royalties on my first published . . .

Look! I am quite rich. After all, royalties *are* royalties, aren't they? What do you think of that now? Five—whole . . .

NELLIE. It's no use your talking, because we discussed every word of this when the cheque arrived this morning. Besides there is only just enough for the two volumes of Brahms; and we simply *must* have that Peters' edition, you know that.

HERON (*quizzically*). *We?* . . .

NELLIE (*valiantly*). Yes, we. You's we, isn't it?

HERON (*tenderly*). Oh, my child! . . .
Look here, I'll tell you what I'll do. *One* volume of Brahms—the one with the Intermezzos—and the rest of it for you. And we'll cry quits.

NELLIE. No! No! I want the Sonatas.

HERON. Well, well, the Sonatas then; and devil take the Intermezzos.

NELLIE. But I don't want him to: I'm greedy: I want both of them myself. Oh, you silly old dear, don't you see, birthday presents don't really matter. They're nothing. I *have* my birthday present. God has given me my birthday present—life and health again, and this new glorious joy in men and women and all the wonderful touching loveliness of the world.

HERON. Thank God for it. Yes, I see that.

NELLIE. And you'll do as your little daughter wants? Both volumes, remember.

HERON. After all, you really are very fond of the Sonatas . . .

NELLIE. Oh, it 'll be a perfectly lovely *pres-pres!*

HERON. For you or for me?

NELLIE. For both of us.

HERON. Oh, but you make me feel ashamed.

NELLIE. It is I, who feel ashamed. I am not worthy. Oh, I ought to have known it all, even when I was lying up there. (But you see, I wasn't twentyone then.) I didn't know how to know. Oh, this dreadful difficult task of growing up: it really is a job, isn't it? But I'm learning, yes I am; and you see, I'll grow to be a credit to you yet. Up there, it was so long, so—*so* many years; and then the codliver oil and the plaster of Paris and all that . . . Oh! I thought I should never see anything again but blue skies and clouds and endless housetops. If there had only been one dear little window—something with the darling head of a human being peeping through . . . But no! A tiny bit of gutter on the opposite roof, where the sparrows lived until the storm came and washed them out— That was the most I ever had.

HERON. Was that all: all you ever had?

NELLIE. No . . . Oh, what a wretch I am!—I had more than that: I had you: I had my dear old Daddy, patient, watching, always by

my bedside, taking care of me, loving me. Even when you were down here with your pupils, you used to make them practise all the things I loved best: *I* noticed it: I *can* see through you, can't I, dear? . . . And then, when you used to climb back again to me, the lovely talks we had! Shall I ever forget them? How I used to wait for them, counting off the pupils one by one by the clock there. After all, it was worth being ill, for the talks we had. Perhaps, if I had been a little well daughter, I should never have heard all those great big wonderful things you taught me. About God. About life. About my own soul.

HERON. The teaching wasn't all on my side, my dear, believe me. You taught me loads of things, you never dreamed of. I don't think I've missed a single thing.

NELLIE. Daddy, you're laughing at me. Why, I said nothing. I never could say anything. I was always just a little dumb beast, with never a word to my mouth.

HERON. You've given me many. You'll be hearing of them by-and-bye. Everyone of them has gone smack into this—my symphony. You'll recognize them, if nobody else does.

NELLIE. So that's what you were up to, sir! And I mistook it for sympathy. And all the time, there you were, just getting material out of me for your music.

HERON. If you like to put it so, you impertinent little devil. No: I watched you because I loved you; and then because I loved you, you gave me ever such a lot of yourself for me to take care of; and I locked it up in my heart, until it grew too big for my heart to hold any longer, and now it's spilling out and away for all the world to wonder at. That's what it is, having a child like you.

Look! So far, there are little bits of you peeping out of every note.

They bend over the manuscript.

NELLIE. Well, isn't that clever of you! To say all that, so beautifully too, just in this way! . . .

Do you know, I think it's you who have made me well again.

HERON. Indeed, I'd like to believe so, Sweetheart.

NELLIE. You're so alive yourself, that's why. And oh, my illness hasn't been wasted, after all! It was all turned to good for *you:* good for your work, I mean.

HERON. Yes, that's a nice pleasant thing to think about!

NELLIE. Daddy, what does it matter, what does anything matter, now I'm downstairs again? Downstairs! No more housetops; but the street, the real live street, and all the lovely people passing by. Oh, how my heart goes out to them. I want to shout to them. I don't think they know about themselves. They take it all so calmly. Oh, I love them, I love them! How I'd like to hug them, everyone of them, to my heart and say: *Isn't it beautiful? Isn't it sweet and beautiful to be alive?* Look at them! Look! Oh, how they walk and look about. Like

little wild things in a wood. Aren't people just too darling for words? This one for instance: this one coming our way now: so unconscious: look at her: Father: this . . .

Something makes her break off suddenly. Her father joins her at the window.

HERON. Where? . . . Which do you mean?

NELLIE. The woman. Look! She . . .

HERON. This one passing now?

NELLIE (*impulsively*). Oh, you poor thing! . . .

She draws back quickly into the shadows of the curtain.

Father, she heard me.

HERON. Did she? I don't think she did.

NELLIE. But the window's open. Didn't you see how—how strangely she looked at me?

HERON. She did look in; but I think the room's getting too . . .
See, the sun has set already.

NELLIE. Oh, those eyes! Those dreadful eyes! . . .

HERON. Come away, my dear. Come into the room.

NELLIE. And straight into my own, as if . . .

HERON. As if what?

NELLIE. Challenging something.

Deep in thought, she crosses to the middle of the room.

There are some things in life, I don't seem to understand.

HERON. You will find there are many things in life like that, my child.

NELLIE. Yes, but some . . . That look, for example . . . As if she wanted me— Yes, me. And then . . . Out again, like a can-

dle-flame. I shall never even see her any more. That's strange, that's pitiful, too.

HERON. Oh, you are your mother's daughter. She was just like that.

NELLIE. Was she?

She turns for a moment towards the portrait. Then, very simply;

Thank you.

HERON. They wanted her too, all the time. She was —well . . . *necessary* to them. I always used to call her their Necessary Good. Her whole life was spent that way—being wanted, and giving herself. That's the way of women, good and bad— Always giving . . .

In the end it killed her, as noble work will sometimes kill.

NELLIE. How?

HERON. God laid too great a burden of pity upon her heart, and at last it broke.

NELLIE. Dear Mother!

They are silent for a space.

I wanted it to be a joyous blue sky of a birthday; but now it just seems as if some grey cloud had crept right across it. Isn't it curious sometimes how one look—just two eyes looking at you . . .

I'm sorry too, because . . .

HERON. Why are you sorry?

NELLIE. Because I had something else to tell you. I wanted it to come—clear: out of the blue sky. It's a secret.

HERON. What, another?

NELLIE. Um: it's wonderful, it's beautiful! Reely!

HERON. I can imagine so. They are your only adjectives.

NELLIE. I've been keeping it for you all day long. That's what the letter meant this morning

at breakfast. The letter I wouldn't let you see.

HERON. Something nice, eh?

NELLIE. It's going to happen almost any moment. It was due at the railway station about five minutes ago; and it hardly takes half an hour to come up here.

HERON. What, the secret?

NELLIE. Yes, he's on the way now.

HERON. He? Oh, it's a gentleman secret, is it?

NELLIE. Um. You'd never guess who he is, not if you tried ever so. Somebody you don't expect.

HERON. Coming here tonight, eh? Soon? . . . (*Sharply.*) A *young* man?

NELLIE. Young, and oh!—ever so handsome. Somebody who loves me.

HERON. Who?

NELLIE. Your son, sir. Brother Frank.

He takes this more gravely than she expected.

HERON. So Frank's coming home, is he? Well, it's about time.

NELLIE. Father, aren't you glad to hear it?

HERON. Yes, I'm glad, right enough. He's my own boy, all said and done. How long is he intending to favour us?

NELLIE. Well, that's the pity of it. He only has two weeks' holiday, and can't spare us more than a couple of days. But one of them's my birthday.

HERON. Hm. Is he in want of anything, do you think? Any—money, for instance?

NELLIE. Father, isn't that just a little bit unkind?

HERON. Well you see, after two whole years of practical neglect . . .

And then, there are other things.

NELLIE. Oh, Frank isn't as bad as you think. He's young: he's irresponsible; and even if he does fling money about— Well, haven't you yourself often said that only rich people take money seriously?

HERON. Oh, it isn't the money . . .
Though by-the-bye, he never even acknowledged that last cheque I sent him.

NELLIE. Well, he's selfish, he's thoughtless, I know; but we are all of us that, when we're young. You should see the beautiful letter he wrote me.

HERON. Yes, they very often can. Very beautiful —letters.
Oh, these lads of ours! How they can wound us to the heart.

NELLIE. Remember what that friend of his told us about him—you know, the man who called to see us: the man who brought me the orchid.

HERON. Yes, I remember the friend. The man who

could bring you an orchid must be a bit of a leper.

NELLIE. Why, Daddy, whatever do you mean?

HERON. Nothing, my child, nothing. Just a bit of symbolism, that's all.

NELLIE. Well, he said Frank was *all right. Quite a man of the world*—that's what he said. I always like to think of him like that. Out in the world, the great big world, doing things.

HERON. I don't think I very much believe in what the world calls right. What I want my boy to be is right, *inside*. Right, God's way: not the world's. If I could be sure of that . . .

NELLIE. Well, you wait till you see the letter. You'll find a difference, I can promise you. I must confess, I felt a little bit doubtful myself, when I wrote and begged him to come; but that was mean of me, because you see, he's coming.

HERON. Oh, you had to write and remind him, did you?

NELLIE. Why, of course. I couldn't expect him to remember my birthday, all by himself.

HERON. Well, all I can say is, if he didn't . . .

NELLIE. Daddy, Daddy! . . .

HERON. Well, well, there, I'll say no more about it.

NELLIE. No: I think you'd better not.

HERON. Oh, we men! I'm afraid we are all alike!

NELLIE. There *are* differences, Daddy. And you are one of them, bless you.

And so, when Frank comes . . . when he is actually here, in the room with you . . .

HERON. Oh, I'll behave myself, if that's what you're driving at.

NELLIE. Father, if anybody heard you, they'd think you didn't love him any longer.

HERON (*hotly*). I do love him. That's why he irritates me so.

NELLIE. Remember, you haven't seen him for two years. He must have changed a deal in that time.

HERON. He's such an argumentative little devil . . . That's what always gets my back up.

NELLIE. All you have to do, is to keep off the one subject—music.

HERON. Oh, I know he has nothing but contempt for my work.

NELLIE. My dear, he is only a boy. You are a grown man, remember.

HERON (*like a child*). Oh, am I? Well . . .

Look here, Nellie, I do love the lad: you know I do; but I don't think children know sometimes, what pain . . . inside here . . . when you're a father . . .

Why, I've had that little chap in my arms, night after night, hundreds of times.

NELLIE (*creeping up to him*). That's my Daddy!

HERON (*brightly*). And tomorrow morning, the very first thing, I'll go out with a big butcher's knife, and see what sort of a fatted calf there is about the place.

NELLIE. Well, you had better be ready with a ring and a robe and a pair of shoes *at once;* because he'll be here in twenty minutes. Less.

Now, what I thought was this. We wouldn't make a grand party of it, with a lot of silly people about. Frank's getting his dinner on the train; and we're only middle-day folk—not like him: so I thought . . . Just Birthday Cake and Tea, like when we were kids— See?

And then we could all sit round cosy together, a regular family affair, just the four of us and nobody else.

HERON. Nellie, this is genius!

NELLIE. Thank you, sir. Just our four selves, see?

HERON. I get your point. Just our . . . eh?

He pauses, interrogatively.

NELLIE (*with intention*). *Four* selves, sir.

HERON. What . . . Alfred?

NELLIE. No: try again. Just *us* four, you know.

HERON. The table is set for four, certainly. You, me, Frank . . . Who's the mystic fourth?

NELLIE. Oh, you can guess, if you try.

He shakes his head.

Mother.

HERON. Now, who but my little Nellie could ever have dreamed of a thing like that?

NELLIE. We can think she's sitting there all the time, looking at us, loving us. Why shouldn't people be set for, just because they're dead? Dead's alive, isn't it? And

then perhaps, even a morsel of cake there and a cup of tea, just as if . . .

There's something sacramental about it, don't you think?

He presses her silently to his heart, and then brings her over to the settee, where they sit.

Their faces can still be seen, but more and more vaguely in the advancing dusk.

HERON. Nellie, for a person with a naturally loving heart, I must say you know just how to stab where it will hurt the most.

NELLIE. That must be the artist in me, Daddy. I got that bad little habit from you.

HERON. Well, perhaps you did. But you got your pity—your sacred pity—from Her.

The thought makes them silent a little.

NELLIE. Why did she have to die, I wonder, just because of that?

HERON. Things hurt her so: the things she had to know: the people she mixed with, had to deal with . . . I can't begin to tell you the sort of people she—was a sister to.

NELLIE. Why, what sort were they?

HERON. Oh mostly—women.

NELLIE. Women . . .
(*Half under her breath.*) What was it, started it—in *her?*

HERON. It was a tragical experience, early in life, when she was about your age. Somebody who had been a friend of hers, a schoolfellow, somebody whom she might have helped; but she did not know. Nobody ever told her. She had been brought up—innocently. Then it became too late. And the friend . . . Well, the poor girl died. Tragically. Horribly.
Her whole life was spent for them after that.

NELLIE. For them. Whom?

HERON. Her sisters.

NELLIE. I think I understand. I've often thought of that, too.

HERON. Have you? I don't think you have.

NELLIE. Father, indeed I have; and it's pitiful: it wrings my heart. The poor—I mean the really very poor, not poor like us—do have a dreadful time of it.

HERON. It's not the poor, I'm speaking of; though God knows, that's often enough a part of the problem, too.

NELLIE. Problem. What problem?

HERON. The problem of—our sisters.

NELLIE. Daddy, I don't know what you mean. I don't really. And I'm usually so quick at getting your subtle allusions.

HERON. Some other time, dearest. Not tonight. Not on your birthday.

NELLIE. But don't you see, that's just why. I'm twentyone. I'm a woman. Besides . . . If you mean . . .

HERON. If I mean what?

NELLIE. If you mean that perhaps my sisters are . . . wanting me . . .

HERON (*quickly*). No, no: not that. Not you. I was only trying to make you understand something about your mother.

NELLIE. It killed her, you say . . .

HERON. Yes, there's the trouble. You have to pay so much, if you take up that kind of thing.

NELLIE. My mother . . . The pity of it killed her . . .

HERON. That and the work.

NELLIE. I see. There's something you have to *do*.

HERON. Yes, but not you, my child. Not you.

NELLIE. But why not I? I'm a woman, too. Like others. Like Mother.

HERON. Oh, but you are speaking in ignorance: in deep utter innocent ignorance, like a child.

NELLIE. Then teach me. Give me light. Let me know.

HERON. It would destroy your happiness.

NELLIE. How can it, if it's the truth? Truth can't destroy happiness.

HERON. This truth can. *Your* happiness.

NELLIE. Then perhaps my happiness is at fault.

HERON. You said only just now: *How beautiful life is!*

NELLIE. Well, isn't it?

HERON. I don't know. We artists like to dream it is. Little children play as though it were. Some few great saints in the world seem to find it so, in spite of everything, unto the

end. But sometimes, I don't know, I don't know.

NELLIE. But why? Oh, Father, can't you tell me why?

HERON. Because of sin—man's sin. Because of destruction—woman's destruction. That's why.

NELLIE *thinks this over for a moment or so. Then, as to herself;*

NELLIE. I'll get to know more about this. Something inside me urges me. Perhaps it's Mother.

There is a long silence between them, as the darkness deepens.

Presently, there is heard a sound outside, through the window. Footsteps. Then two voices, a man's and a woman's.

MAN. 'Ere you, Daisy. What are you spying around for? This ain't your beat.

WOMAN. Don't you speak to me. Keep off, I tell you!

MAN. (*quite good-humouredly*). Oh, you beauty!

WOMAN. Light your lamp, man, and get along on your rounds.

MAN. Well, I can't take you along with me; so 'just one kiss before we part' you know . . . (*Aggrieved.*) Oh, orl right, sulky. Since you're one o' them sort! . . .

He lights the street lamp, which is gas and can be seen through the window. It sends a sickly glare over the piano, reaching the portrait on the wall. The father and the daughter still sit in the gloom of the settee.

Well, so long, duckie. Ain't yer going ter say good night? Oh, orl right then! . . .

He clatters off on his rounds, singing the following edifying song;

(Song) You'd take 'er for a milliner,
Wivaht no thought of ill in 'er,
She looks that soft and artless in the eye;
She'd not so much as walk with yer,
To 'ear 'er kind of talk with yer;
But ain't she just a warm un on the sly!

His voice dies away not unmelodiously in the distance.

When all is silent again, the girl speaks;

NELLIE. Let it be Brahms, Father. Something beautiful. Just to take the taste away, you know.

HERON. As we are? In the dark?

NELLIE. Yes. You'll just have time before Frank comes.

He rises and goes to the piano.

HERON. Well, what is it to be?

NELLIE. The Intermezzo, of course. *My* Intermezzo.

He commences the Intermezzo: Andante, largo e mesto; Op. 118, No. 6.

The light of the street lamp falls upon him from behind: his face is in deep shadow. The girl in her white dress, down on the settee, looks like a little pale ghost.

JOHN HERON *may not have been successful with his compositions; but he knows how to play with certainty, sincerity and interpretation. He has poetry and imagination; but does not slop over; and he knows what Brahms means.*

He reaches the transitional chord in bar 20, when the girl speaks;

NELLIE. How wonderful! . . . It's as though Mother's spirit had just entered the room.

JOHN HERON *holds the chord through her speech, and passes on, continuing the Intermezzo.*

NELLIE *rises softly and joins him at the piano, resting one hand lovingly upon his shoulder. Presently, she turns away to the window, leaning against the frame, looking out. The light of the street lamp is upon her face.*

JOHN HERON *reaches the transitional chord in bar 40, when his daughter's sudden exclamation stops him short.*

NELLIE. Father! . . .

HERON. *Oh,* Nellie! . . . What is it, my child?

NELLIE. She's out there. Look! She's moving away. She's been listening.

HERON. Why, it's the very same woman.

NELLIE. Ssh! She'll hear you. I'll . . . I'd like to speak to her.

HERON. No, Nellie, I . . .

He restrains her;

I don't want you to, Nellie. Not you.

NELLIE. But if she's wanting me? . . .

HERON. Nonsense: she doesn't want you. She was just listening to old Brahms.

NELLIE. Yes, that was rather nice of her, too.

HERON. Come, let's have a light on the subject. Where are the matches? Oh . . .

NELLIE. There *is* a sort of magic in it—meeting people's eyes. And I thought I should never see her any more.

HERON. Come, come, my child. Frank will be here before you can say Jack Robinson.

NELLIE. Oh, how selfish of me. I had forgotten Frank.

JOHN HERON *has struck a match.*

HERON. Now (*indicating the candles*) do I light these things?

NELLIE. No, no: that's my ceremony, later. You just light the gas, whilst I go and look after the kettle. It's Mary's night out, you know.

When she goes to the door, she turns, the light of the street lamp reaching her up there;

Oh, Daddy, perhaps life *is* a little beautiful, after all. Frank's coming.

And she goes out, the gladness struggling back again into her eyes.

JOHN HERON, *left alone, lights the gas, and then his pipe. He goes to the right, and throws the match into the fire. He turns up the room, catches sight of his wife's portrait, stops, and stands looking at it.*

Then;

HERON. What a curious child! . . .

He thinks a little: then goes to the piano, and plays over the pianissimo phrase, bars 17 to 20, of the Intermezzo, ending with the transitional chord first mentioned above.

Hm! So it is: so it is.

A moment later there is heard a hearty rat-tat-tat at the street door.

It's my boy! . . .

A rushing of glad feet along the passage, a pause, and a babble of laughter and voices, as brother and sister meet.
And they burst into the room.

FRANK *is a handsome young fellow, quite lovable, almost likable. He throws down his coat and his hat and bag, anywhere, anyhow, as he enters.*

FRANK. Let's get rid of these dratted things, and I'll kiss you again. Now, where's your mouth! . . .

By Jove though, isn't she a spanker! Why you're almost as big as . . . Filled out, too! Here, wait a moment . . .

He fishes into his bag and brings out a parcel done up.

Many happy returns of the day, and here's a—what was it, we used to call them? —here's a *pres-pres* for you.

NELLIE. Oh! Frank!!

She begins tugging at the string, first with her fingers, then with her teeth.

FRANK. Look at her! Mind your teeth, now. You won't get any more kisses, if you spoil your pretty teeth. Here, try this.

NELLIE. There's a pretty knife for a man! Mother of pearl! Where did you get it?

FRANK. That? Oh—a girl.

NELLIE. A girl gave you a knife! Well . . .

FRANK. Why, what's the matter?

NELLIE. Cuts love, you know.

FRANK. Well, perhaps there wasn't much to cut in this case.

NELLIE. Frank: you're engaged!

FRANK. Me? Not if I know it!

NELLIE. Now for the *pres-pres!*

She attacks the string with the knife in her clumsy woman's way. (They really don't know how to use knives.)

FRANK, *who has been including his father in the above conversation, by all sorts of knowing little winks and nods, now addresses him directly;*

FRANK. Well, Dad!

HERON. My boy, my dear boy!

They shake hands, shyly, as men will, after long absence.

NELLIE. Father's going to kill a fatted calf for you tomorrow. Had your *din-din?*

FRANK. Got it on the train. Fatted calf, eh? . . . Well, that's better than railway *patie de fois gras* and champagne.

Well now, how's things? How's the music?

HERON (*pleased*). Oh, the music's all right, thankee, my boy. Got three new pupils; and they've voted me that rise in salary up at the church, at last! How's electricity?

FRANK. A, one. Things going ahead like wildfire over yonder. Think they ought to be doing something for me, the way they're making money.

HERON. That's good. Oh, I'm doing famously, I can tell you. Why, only this very morning . . .

But NELLIE *has opened her parcel;*

NELLIE. Oh, Frank, how beautiful! . . . Daddy, look!

HERON. Yes, isn't it? Frank, only this very . . . Yes, beautiful . . . It was at breakfast time . . .

NELLIE. Real silver, too! It's simply too lovely for . . . What is it?

FRANK. Oh, just . . . Powder-puff or something.

NELLIE (*blankly*). Powder? . . .

FRANK. Yes, rub on your nose, you know.

NELLIE. Oh. I'll get some at once.

HERON. Frank, we were just sitting down to breakfast, when the postman . . .

NELLIE. Oh, but you naughty boy. You must have paid an awful lot of money for a thing like this.

FRANK. Nonsense. What's the use of having a pretty woman on the premises, if you don't spend money on her?

Now, Father. What did the postman say he had for breakfast this morning?

HERON. I didn't mention the postman. I was going to tell you about my royalties.

FRANK. About your what?

HERON. Got a cheque, my boy. Came this morning. A cheque for royalties on my first published song.

FRANK. First, eh? You don't mean to tell me you've been publishing any more of them.

HERON (*hastily*). No, no, it's the same song—the old one, you know. But just fancy! Royalties! Why, I'll be able to buy almost all the music I want, soon, with all these royalties pouring in.

FRANK. What do you think of that, now? Father's music turning out valuable in his old age.

NELLIE. It's true. Isn't it splendid?

FRANK. Splendid isn't the word for it. Look here, Dad. Guess what. I saw a copy of that old song of yours the other day, for sale.

HERON. Did you hear that, Nellie? What did I tell you? I'm getting known.

FRANK. I tell you, it made me feel as proud as punch.

HERON. I'll bet it did, bless you. Where was this?

FRANK. Oh, down in the City somewhere . . .

HERON (*to* NELLIE). *City*, mind you! One of these big places, I'll be bound, where they *do* keep an intelligent eye on a man's work.

FRANK. Well, I can't say that exactly, Father. The place was quite small.

HERON (*conceding the point*). Well, that's a trifle.

FRANK. It was a second-hand bookstall.

HERON. Oh.

And he cogitates solemnly as NELLIE *sweeps into the conversation.*

NELLIE. And now, dearly beloved brethren, for the real business of the evening. You've had dinner, and so have we. Nothing remains therefore, but for me to introduce you to my birthday cake. Birthday Cake: this is my brother, Frank.

FRANK *contemplates the cake attentively for a moment: then bows;*

FRANK. How do you do, Miss? Ah—Saucy! She's winking candles at me.

NELLIE. Isn't he funny? Cakes aren't *shes*.

FRANK. This one is. I say, Nellie, have I got to eat all this?

NELLIE. It's all very well, you talking! You were always the greedy-greedy when you were a kid.

FRANK. Fate is just. I accept my punishment.

NELLIE. Pig! I'll go and make the tea.

She dances to the door, and turns;

Black tea: strong tea: tea like coffee: tea with all the tannin in it: the kind of tea that you and Daddy like! Ugh!

And with a grimace and a kiss of the hand, she vanishes.

JOHN HERON *wakes up sadly as from a trance;*

HERON. Frank, tell me. What price were they asking for that little cradle song of mine?

FRANK. Father, to tell you the truth, I couldn't exactly reckon that out. It was one of a bundle, offered job lot.

HERON. Hm! . . .

Look here, Frank, you don't understand anything about music, I know that; but

did there happen to be a name like Johannes Brahms tucked away in the oblivion of that bundle?

FRANK. Brahms? No, I should have spotted him at once. He's the chap, you're always thumping at, isn't he?

HERON. Then if Brahms wasn't there, who in the devil's name was?

FRANK. I don't think I quite . . . Yes, I do. There was a fellow called Strauss for one.

HERON. Richard? ! ! . . .

FRANK. Yes, you've got it: that's it—Richard.

JOHN HERON *goes and sits down on the keyboard of the piano. In the bass. The cacophony relieves him.*

And NELLIE *enters with the tea.*

NELLIE. And now, we're all going to be really happy, aren't we?

Isn't this glorious, Frank? *You* never saw me up and about and able to make tea before.

FRANK. I've been thinking I ought to have written to you oftener, Nellie; but somehow things . . .

Well, I'm sorry I didn't, now.

NELLIE. Dear Frank! . . .

Oh, I tell you, I'm growing: growing fast. I'm going to become a terror in this household. I've commenced to take up some of my responsibilities already.

This tickles FRANK *exceedingly.*

Well, of all the ungrateful . . . Brother, stop laughing!

FRANK. Responsibilities! You! . . .

NELLIE. Frank! Frank! Father, do something to him.

HERON. Well, you know, my child, tea isn't very much of a responsibility.

NELLIE. That's all very well. *You* don't know who made the soup you had today at dinner.

HERON. Soup? What soup?

NELLIE. The soup you turned up your nose at, and said was salty.

HERON. And so it was—damnably salty.

NELLIE. Well, I made it, see? It was my first attempt. But I start rissoles tomorrow.

Both men look at each other weakly.

FRANK (*suddenly*). Father, I'm going away again tonight.

HERON. Tonight? What for?

FRANK. Before Nellie makes shipwreck of me, with her responsibilities.

NELLIE (*with mock gravity*). You know, Frank, you've got the makings of a really bad man in you.

I tell you, you won't laugh at my sense of responsibility, by the time I've done. I've got lots of little plans working in my head: plans much more important than soup and rissoles: plans about life, about my work in the world, about—real things.

FRANK. Bless her, isn't she sweet?

NELLIE. But come, this isn't tea. Now, Frank, there's you. There's you, Daddy. Here's me—I mean, I. And over there is . . .

She has planted FRANK *to the right of the table, her* FATHER *to the left,* HERSELF *at the bottom with her back to the Audience; and she is now indicating the vacant place at the head of the table.*

FRANK. Who?

NELLIE (*softly*). Our mother.

FRANK *takes this in: then he gets up and kisses her.*

FRANK. Good kid.

He goes back to his place. NELLIE *is pouring out the tea.*

NELLIE. Well, that ought to be black enough to please a nigger. Please, Daddy . . .

He places the cup at the head of the table.

Oh, I'm sure she's there! . . .
Sug-sug, Frank?

FRANK. Three for me. Plenty of cream.

NELLIE. You're like Daddy. He's the sweetest tooth of any man I ever met.

HERON. Well, you've not met many, you know.

NELLIE. I know all about them, for all that. I haven't lived twentyone years in the house with you, Daddy dear, without getting to know everything there is to know about men.

FRANK. If you learned everything you know about men from the Dad, Nellie, you're still in the teething stage. It's like one baby trying to teach another.

HERON (*laughing*). You impudent young dog! What do you know about it, I'd like to know!

FRANK. I know more about it than you, Dad. I tell you, I've been keeping my eyes open, out there in the City. I've been studying life.

HERON. *Life!* In the *City!*

FRANK. Oh, life isn't everything you think it is in poky little holes like this. We men of the world—of the real world, mind you . . .

HERON. Hark at him! If you men of the world, as you call yourselves, think you can teach . . .

FRANK. Look here, Dad, you mean well, I know that. Lots of old gentlemen mean well. But you're simply not born yet. Do you understand? Get that into your head, dear old chap, and be humble-minded.

HERON. Well, I'm . . .

All of which has been done with excellent good humour, both sides; but now NELLIE *thinks it best to step in;*

NELLIE. Now, now, gentlemen, no argufying. Father, you ought to be ashamed of yourself, setting up your opinion against your son's! No! I won't hear a word of your defence! . . .

Besides . . .

This is a serious point in the ceremonial of the evening. I'm going to light the candles.

FRANK. If you'd only have let me know beforehand, I'd have brought over a full electrical rig-out for you.

NELLIE. Frank, you decadent! Candles are a part of the mystery. Can't you understand?

She rises. Her back is still to the Audience.

Look at them, the darlings! Twentyone of them. There's a candle for every one

of the years I have been in the world: the first little cradle years, when I couldn't even walk and talk: the dear happy school years when Mother was alive, all sunny brightness and I never knew: the long weary plaster of Paris and codliver oil years, up there in my bedroom; and last of all, this blessed beautiful Now, when I'm downstairs and strong again, and a grown woman. Thank God for every one of them!

And the first little candle—that little white plump one in the middle—is going to be lighted by Mother. I'll be Mother.

She runs round to the head of the table, and now faces the Audience.

Brethren, rise. The ceremony.

Both men rise obediently.

Frank, lower the gas a little: just . . . Thanks. Daddy, give me a match.

They do so. The gas is just above the table, sending down a pale light.

NELLIE *lights the middle candle. The ceremony holds them for a moment.*

That's how I began—a little weak flame, lighted on earth by Mother. And now she's gone, and I'm grown up. Isn't life strange?

Dear God, make me like her. Make use of me. Give me pity, that I may spend myself for others. Like my mother.

There is heard a low slow knocking at the street door. Three knocks.

Oh, how it made me jump!

HERON. Who can it be, I wonder.

NELLIE. Frank, you answer. There's only ourselves in the house.

FRANK *goes out of the room.*

HERON. Rather an awkward moment for visitors, isn't it?

NELLIE. Hark! It's a woman talking . . .

HERON. Perhaps it's only some poor . . .

NELLIE. Ssh! . . .

FRANK *comes back into the room.*

FRANK. It's a woman. Wants to see *you.* 'The young lady' she says.

NELLIE. What does she want with me?

FRANK. I don't know. 'Must see the young lady.' Wants you. That's all I could get out of her.

NELLIE. Wants me! Father . . .
Ask her in here.

FRANK *knits his brows thoughtfully.*

FRANK. In here, eh?

NELLIE. Yes.

FRANK (*significantly*). Well . . .

He speaks through the open doorway;

Won't you come in?

The WOMAN *enters.*

She is tall, dark, sombre. She is dressed rather well, but quietly, with some taste; and is obviously poor. Her face has strangely enough a certain Madonna-like beauty about it—a beauty smitten across by some tragical and nameless horror.

She stands for a moment in the doorway, silent, her eyes fixed upon the young girl. Indeed, she hardly ever looks away from her; and it will be observed, she never once addresses directly either of the two men.

NELLIE. Father, I knew it! It's the . . .

There is a long pause. FRANK *is to the right, near the fireplace: his* FATHER *left by the settee:* NELLIE, *up to the* WOMAN'S *left, facing her.*

WOMAN. I oughtn't to have come in, by rights. I have no right here, at all: no human right. I knew that, the moment I entered the passage. But I'm here; and I can't go back again, unless you tell me.

That's strange, too. Here. In this room. With *you.*

NELLIE. I am sure, you are very . . .

WOMAN. No. Not if you knew.

FRANK *looks up quickly, suspiciously;*

FRANK. Perhaps, if it's any help you want, my father, or even myself . . .

The WOMAN *turns a long clear look upon him; then the eyes travel back again to* NELLIE.

WOMAN. Perhaps I ought to go away again. I will, if you tell me. Back to—my own place.

NELLIE. No, no, I want you to stay. I do, really.

HERON. I'm not quite sure, Nellie; but if . . .

WOMAN. Maybe, he's right. You'd better let me go.

NELLIE. I can't. I don't know why. But there's something holding me; and I want you.

WOMAN. God knows, I want you.

NELLIE. That settles it then.

WOMAN. But you don't know me.

NELLIE. I know you by sight. I saw you tonight, out there through the window. You were listening to the music.

WOMAN. Yes, I was listening—to the music.

NELLIE. So you see, there is some kind of bond between us, and therefore . . .

WOMAN. But you don't know me. You don't know what I am.

NELLIE. I don't want to know. I only know that

you are very unhappy. I saw that, out there.

WOMAN. What is my unhappiness, that it should touch the innocent heart of a flower like you?

NELLIE. You're a woman. And I'm one, too.

The WOMAN *considers this for a moment: then she says slowly;*

WOMAN. I'm a woman, am I? Thank you. I had forgotten.

NELLIE. But don't you see, you love people because you love them. Just because they're people. You don't mind anything about their being . . . well—poor.

WOMAN. It's not poverty, I'm thinking of.

NELLIE. Well then, because they're unhappy . . .

WOMAN. I'm not thinking of unhappiness.

NELLIE. Then won't you tell me what it is?

WOMAN. It's a word, I've only just learned. An old-fashioned word. I heard it through the window.

NELLIE. Tell it me.

WOMAN. Sin.

FRANK *cannot conceal his irritation any longer; though he tries as far as he knows how, not to hurt the* WOMAN'S *feelings;*

FRANK. Yes, but look here, Nellie, if this poor woman is in any trouble or anything, perhaps some other time . . . with my father, alone . . . or again, a note to the clergyman of the parish— After all, they're paid to look after cases like these. Surely, it isn't quite appropriate for you, a young girl . . . And at a time like this, too!

He turns to the WOMAN *herself;*

You see, my sister is only an inexperienced child: she doesn't understand. Nat-

urally, her sympathies . . . And then again, her immaturity . . .

What do you think, Father? Don't you think I'm right?

HERON. Eh, what's that? . . . I beg your pardon: I don't think I quite . . .

FRANK. Oh Dad, dear old chap, do wake up! This isn't the time to be mooning about music!

HERON (*gently*). It wasn't music, my boy. I was thinking about something—about somebody—else.

FRANK. Oh, all right then, if you weren't listening!

Washing his hands of the whole matter, he flings himself disgustedly into the comfortable arm-chair. There is something indescribably manly about him. And he bites his nails.

The WOMAN'S *eyes have never left the girl.*

WOMAN. Well? . . .

NELLIE. Stay.

Be at home, won't you? Won't you take your hat off?

The WOMAN *obeys mechanically, still looking at her.*

And now we can go right on from where we left off before you came in. You see, you happen to have arrived at a very important moment in my life. I'm twenty-one. This is my birthday party. It's really a very silly little birthday party—only cake and tea; but if you don't mind joining us . . .

WOMAN. Thank you: I don't think I want to eat, here.

NELLIE. Well, at least, a nice warm cup of tea . . .

WOMAN. Thank you: I don't think I want to drink, here. But if you don't mind, I would just like to sit down a little—only a little. I've been walking.

She sits down at the head of the table.

NELLIE. Now, that's just what I was hoping you would do—to sit down there. In that place, I mean. Do you know, whom that place was set for?

The WOMAN *shakes her head.*

It was set for somebody very precious to all of us in this room. It was set for my mother.

The WOMAN *rises instinctively, her eyes widening.*

That's her portrait behind you. Perhaps I ought to tell you: she's dead.

The WOMAN'S *head turns slowly towards the picture.*

So you will take her place, won't you? *She*'d like you to, if she were here. She *is* here.

WOMAN. She is very like you.

NELLIE. Thank you. Then won't you?

The WOMAN *looks at her steadily;*

WOMAN. Yes, I will.

She sits down. FRANK *takes out his pipe and sticks it viciously into his mouth.*

NELLIE. Now, Daddy . . . Now, Frank . . .

FRANK. Thank you, I'm very comfortable where I am. If you don't mind, I'll smoke.
Oh, but perhaps *you* . . .

After which courtesy, he smiles ironically into the fire. The WOMAN *makes no answer. So he lights up; and at certain points in the conversation following, puffs vigorously.*

NELLIE. Perhaps after all, it's better, just us two women. They like their pipes, you know.

Which gives her FATHER *the hint to*

light up and sit down on the settee. He is more or less in the gloom: the two women are in the pale light of the candle and lowered gas; and the young man in the red glow of the fire.

After a silence, the WOMAN *begins to speak;*

WOMAN. I suppose that's what first drew me in—your innocence. I felt I had to come. I felt I had something to say to you. A sort of message from the underworld. You see, young girls don't know.

NELLIE. Yes, I've been realising that, all day long—how appallingly ignorant of life, I am.

WOMAN. But I don't want to hurt you, mind—not really hurt you—not hurt the thing inside you: your innocence.

NELLIE. Go on.

WOMAN. And you've got to listen very carefully.

Because I'm going to say things that have never been said so openly before, not in front of young girls.

But since I'm . . . for the moment . . .

Something almost beautiful illumines her face;

your mother . . . and you're my child . . .

NELLIE. Oh, I understand, indeed I understand. Do go on.

WOMAN. Then listen.

I suppose you *do* know how babies come into the world, don't you? They *did* tell you that?

NELLIE. I don't think I quite . . . What do you mean exactly?

WOMAN. The physical fact. The natural beautiful physical fact. How they come.

NELLIE *is silent for a moment. Then she answers in a low voice;*

NELLIE. Yes, I know that.

WOMAN. I'm glad. Some parents are so foul-minded, they don't even teach their children that.

FRANK (*under his breath*). Well, my God! . . .

And he taps out his pipe on the hob.

WOMAN. And next: have you ever been in love? In love with a man, I mean. Have you?

NELLIE (*her head bent low*). Yes . . .

WOMAN. Have you ever thought what it meant, to marry him? *All* that it meant? To live with him, to give up everything for him, to be with him, by his side, always? Always? . . .

NELLIE. Something of all this, yes—at times . . . Perhaps vaguely, unconsciously. I don't know that I ever let myself think of it quite so clearly until now.

WOMAN. Try and think of it clearly, actually. Don't

be ashamed, afraid. Don't think of it merely as some vague romantic bliss, some idle paradise of happy-ever-afterwards. Think of it as it is. To speak more plainly: Have you ever thought of yourself as a wife, as a man's wife? Have you ever thought of yourself as a mother, as the mother of a man's child?

NELLIE. Oh, but you hurt me, you hurt me!

WOMAN. I don't want to hurt you.

NELLIE. I can't help it really. But something inside of me . . .

WOMAN. Look at it steadily. It won't hurt you, if you look at it steadily.

NELLIE. I'm trying to. Indeed I am.

WOMAN. It's really beautiful, if you only look at it steadily. It must be beautiful; because children are very beautiful.

NELLIE. Forgive me: I'm ashamed of myself: only

I wasn't ready for it. But I do see: really I do. Yes, I do.

WOMAN. Well now: can you imagine a woman being like that, living like that, with a man—a man!—intimately, daily, hourly . . . without even ever . . .

NELLIE (*delicately*). Without children? Is that what you mean?

WOMAN. No, I didn't mean that; though God knows, there's that also for some of us.

NELLIE. Then what did you mean? Without what?

WOMAN. It's difficult to tell you . . . Your face . . . Turn your face away from me.

NELLIE *does so, wonderingly.*

What I meant was . . . without loving him, without gladness, joy, desire of children in the heart: even despising, loathing him: without human feeling—not even the feeling of an outraged beast.

NELLIE. Marry a man, live with him, be all that to him, without—love! It's not possible!

WOMAN. It happens.

NELLIE. In this world? This beautiful world?

WOMAN. Throughout the length and breadth of it.

NELLIE. Oh! Oh!

WOMAN. There are millions of women like that in the world, unmarried—and married!

NELLIE. Oh!

WOMAN. Yes, have your horror out. It hurts me; but it is well you should see the vileness of it.

NELLIE. But a woman! I can't imagine . . . How can she? It's not possible.

WOMAN. In hell, all things are possible.

NELLIE. But the man himself! Her man! Even he . . .

WOMAN. *He! One* man! Do you talk of *one* man? Her loathing is not for *one!* There's many of them! Many men! . . . Ugh! Hundreds!

NELLIE. Oh, but it can't be true. Life's not like that. This is God's world! Why, Christ came over nineteen hundred years ago!

WOMAN. So I've heard men say.

NELLIE. It's *not* true. How do you know?

WOMAN. It *is* true. I *do* know.

NELLIE. But how? How?

WOMAN. Can you bear it?

The girl bows her head, weakly.

I am one of them.

She receives it dumbly, like something stricken. There is a long silence. After a while, something begins to work

in her face; but whether horror or pity cannot yet be seen. At last, she falters;

NELLIE. I didn't understand. I only thought you were poor, wretched, unhappy.

WOMAN. And so I am. Poor! Cast out! Beggared in body and in soul! Lost, lost forever!

The girl's soul stands trembling over infinite abysses. She steadies herself by a great effort, looking calmly with great eyes at the WOMAN. *Then all the youth, the innocence, the understanding, the untouched virgin of her soul, leap out in a pure white flame of pity;*

NELLIE. Oh, but I love you! Don't be lost, don't be lost. Look up! Be saved!

And so they stand, face to face, virgin and harlot. Sisters.

FRANK *has risen from the arm-chair.*

For the moment, the situation has held him too. Now in a towering fury, he lets himself go;

FRANK. Father, this is disgusting! Are you going to stand by and see your daughter . . . Here, what's that damned light down for? Let's have no more of this theatrical tomfoolery! . . . Lot of blasted rot! . . .

He turns up the gas savagely, flooding the place with light. Himself, too.

Father, do you hear me? Are you going to stand all this blatant indecency being poured wholesale into your daughter's ears?

HERON. (*rising*). The living God being my helper, yes, I am.

FRANK. Then all I can say, is . . .

WOMAN. Oh, they don't like these things spoken about, these men—some men. Not out loud, you understand. In their clubs perhaps, or their drinking saloons, or in the

adulterous high parliaments and senates where they sit like gods and manage the world for us women—in snickers, and mucky whispers, and liquor-sodden imbecilities; but not out aloud! Oh, it hurts them: makes them uncomfortable: disturbs their peace—out loud! They don't mind what deeds they *do*, hidden away in the black darkness of their lives, unknown, out of sight—and God in Heaven is blind! But you mustn't ever speak about it! Not out aloud, you understand! Not aloud, like this!

FRANK. It's because of this young girl, I tell you, this unspotted girl . . . my sister . . .

WOMAN. Oh yes, their wives, their daughters, their little sisters must be sheltered: *they* must be protected: no harm come to their pure ears. Christ's blood! What about *our* lives? What about us?

FRANK. You! Why you're only a common . . .

HERON. Frank! . .

WOMAN. Oh, I know the word, well enough! We are only the dirt out of the streets yonder. Man's dirt! Husbands', fathers' dirt: dirt of sons and brothers! . . .

FRANK. Father! . . . Nellie, stop your ears!

WOMAN. I'll make them listen to me. I'll cry out upon them. I'll discover their nakedness, their shame. This voice of mine shall be prophetic and reach to the uttermost parts of the earth.

NELLIE. But do you mean to tell me that men . . . Men, like my father here, like brother, like Alfred . . . Men, made in the image of God . . .

WOMAN. Some men: many men: oh, you can know them, if you watch them carefully enough.

NELLIE. But their faces . . . Their beautiful good faces . . . Oh! . . .

WOMAN. Watch them—the straight ones won't mind. Watch them. They can't hide themselves,

if you watch carefully enough. Track them down. Don't leave off watching till you find their souls.

NELLIE. But how can I—an inexperienced girl . . .

WOMAN. That's why! That's what your innocence is for.

NELLIE. My innocence . . .

WOMAN. Yes, if it's alive: not asleep or idle or dreaming.

NELLIE. Then innocence is—something that must be *done?*

WOMAN. Yes, not drugged, not put away and wrapped in cotton wool. It's something violent: unresting. Something that must never leave off working.

NELLIE. I see, I see: the dove and the serpent: you must have them both . . .

Oh, but the waste, the waste, the wickedness of it! All these years. Something

ought to have been done by now. And He died so long ago! Surely, our religions, our many, many hundreds of religions ought to have saved us!

WOMAN. They have been too busy damning one another.

NELLIE. But the Law— What's the Law for? The Law cannot possibly overlook a thing like this?

WOMAN. Oh, it punishes the woman right enough, when it catches her.

NELLIE. Punishes? . . . But the man . . . What of the man?

WOMAN. Man makes the Law.

NELLIE. Yes, but when he makes it about a thing like this . . .

WOMAN. This thing is recognised by some Christian countries, legally. Recognised. provided for, accepted.

NELLIE. What! Countries like—like ours?

WOMAN. Oh, some countries are quite polite about it! It's not exactly recognised; but winked at. Especially where there are great armies of soldiers.

NELLIE. But what have they to say about it? How can they justify such a thing?

WOMAN. Oh, there are always words, philosophies . . .

NELLIE. What possible words, what possible philosophy can justify a nameless horror like this?

WOMAN. Oh, it has a name. Philosophy, which argued away the name of God and gave a clod of mud for Man, has found a name for it, right enough.

NELLIE. A name? For this? What is it?

WOMAN. The Necessary Evil.

NELLIE. Oh, but what blasphemy! Evil . . . necessary?

WOMAN. Necessary. That's what they say.

FRANK is going to put an end to this. He gathers himself up for violent assault. He is purple with rage.

The two women are still in the middle. The following dialogue between the two men is hurled across them from one side of the room to the other.

FRANK. And so it is necessary. *This* evil. Nellie, you don't understand—you're a woman. But Father's a man: he *must* understand: he can't be such a born blind . . . Father! Listen to me. You must listen to me. Are we to stand here, and let these women . . . My God! It's unbearable! Unthinkable! My own sister . . .

HERON. Go on, my boy, I'm listening. Listening very intently.

FRANK. *You* know what a man's life is, Father. You . . . You must have . . . sometimes in your life . . . You . . . Damn it, you

must know what it is to have to be a man!

HERON. Yes, that's true. I know something about that.

FRANK. And life isn't such a damnably easy thing, all said and done.

HERON. Yes, I know something about that, too.

FRANK. Very well then. We don't like it—afterwards. We don't love ourselves for it, do we? We didn't make ourselves. *We* didn't invent our beastly passions. After all, God made us: at least I suppose He did. We're told He did. He's the one to . . .

HERON. Take care, my boy. Don't add blasphemy to the rest of it.

FRANK. Blasphemy be . . .

He loses his head more and more as he proceeds;

Besides, who is going to accept the state-

ments of a woman like this? I tell you, I'm sick of all this pious talk and snivelling and sentimentality about man's sin and woman's degradation and the rest of it. Some of these women choose the life: they like it: they do it wilfully with their eyes open. Fifty per cent of them. More. They were born that way: intended for it: *they* don't know anything of all the high talk and prophetic piffle this woman has been treating us to, I can tell you! They come to you, dozens of them, brazenly, openly, and . . . Well, I could tell you some pretty tales about them, if I wanted to; but I won't! . . .

HERON. No: I think perhaps you'd better not.

FRANK. It's they, the women, these women, who nearly always make the first overtures. We'd get on all right, if there weren't any damned women in the world. It's like Adam and Eve in the Bible. After all, I believe what my Bible tells me: *The woman did tempt me, and I did eat.*

HERON. Your unanimity with Adam does you both credit.

FRANK. And as for their blessed whining about their poverty and their childless lives and their outcast this and their shunned the other . . .

HERON. I see, it destroys everything. Not only honour, truth, manliness. It makes you unpitiful, too.

FRANK (*fiercely*). What does?

HERON (*more fiercely*). Lust! Man's lust!

FRANK *goes all to pieces, sputtering;*

FRANK. Oh, but Father, it's different with you . . . You don't know what it is! You're not like the rest of us! You're not like other men.

HERON. Am I not? Do I look like a weakling?

FRANK. No, but you were born different. Pure, innocent, simple—call it what you like. And then, too, your quiet pottering sort of life down here: your occupations . . . You can't imagine, you can't begin to imagine

what temptation of this sort is to other men.

HERON. Yes, I've had that told me before—by men, down at the club. Club men! They've come to me, slopping with leers and with whiskey, and told me I was different. Born different! Made of some other stuff. Men with pale faces, loose lips, and a certain lurid wolf-look in the eye, red rims to them; or else the other sort—the sort with blotches: *they* have told me that. *Me!* Me with my crimson blood, clear head, clean liver, and a heart thumping like a steam-hammer! I can't imagine, can't I? Look at me! Damn you, look at me! Do I look as if I can't imagine?

FRANK *does not answer this point.*

Don't you make any mistake about it, my boy. I know all about it. I know everything that these men of the world know. But I know something else as well.

FRANK. Well, what's that?

HERON. Something they would laugh at: something hideously funny to men of the world!

FRANK. Well, well, what is it?

HERON. That there is a Man in this world—a Real Man, an Alive Man—Who is the power unto salvation from sin.

FRANK. Isn't that a little old-fashioned, Father?

HERON. Just a few thousand years, yes: I hope so.

FRANK. You won't find people agreeing with you.

HERON. They'll have to, or be damned.

FRANK. After all, even the churches aren't so severe as you. They're coming up to date on this point as on all the others.

HERON. Let them. They'll crumble into ruin the sooner, and give *God's* Church a chance.

FRANK. But the scientists, the philosophers, the

great thinkers of the age—they're nearly all of them against you.

HERON. Oh, to hell with *them!*

FRANK. But there's not a book you can take up, not a play you can go and see, the whole of modern literature, music, art—they have all decided on my side. Look here, Father, *you're* a musician. *You* ought to understand. After all, Art means something, doesn't it?

HERON. Don't you talk to me about Art! I'm an artist. I know all about Art! Oh, I know I'm unsuccessful, not known—that sort of success in these days you can share with pills and newspaper editors and politicians —and it's true, I've only published one trumpery bit of a song, and am vain as a peacock about that; but I am an artist, all the same. God's flame burns in me, too; and the people I *do* reach, just the few of them, here in this little tin-pot of a place—aye, and beyond it, too—they know it! Nay, I'll prophesy: they shall know it in

all nations, down the ages, after today! . . . And I tell you now, we're going to alter all this modern cackle and moon-calf worship of the bawdy bestiality they are calling Art! Yes, I—I—I, and the people like me! We are going to have the Real Thing here presently. Don't you think these filth-mongers are going to have it all their own way. Not whilst we're here! The Real Thing, like the Kingdom of Heaven, is upon us! The Thing that Bach and Beethoven and Brahms stood for: the Thing that gave us Shakespeare and Euripides and Sophocles and mighty Aeschylus: the Thing that tells us the truth about God and life and human destinies and all the imperishables in the kingdom of our everlasting souls. And I'm part of it! . . .

Art! You call it Art! The dirty spewings and indecencies, the greasy lusts, the back-stair adulteries, abortions, and abominations of a pack of beastly decadents! It's going to be altered, I tell you; and soon. We're going to clean out this cesspool before long. And until then, let there be at least one artist to stand up in all

this world of liars, and flout it in the face!

FRANK. Meaning yourself, I suppose.

HERON. You know whom I mean. Whether it's I, or somebody else, doesn't very much matter. I've told you my opinion of these others; and I hope they'll get to know about it.

FRANK. All the same, I don't see that this has to do with the problem we are discussing.

HERON. Hasn't it? Look into it deeply, and you'll find it has. If Religion and Art conspire in lying, how is the world ever going to be saved?

FRANK. Saved! Who's talking about saving? Father, I do wish you'd stow this evangelical clap-trap!

HERON. Do you find the world so beautiful then, that you think it doesn't need it?

FRANK. Oh, curse the world! Curse religion! Curse

art! They've nothing whatever to do with it. It's the way a man's made. Our disgusting bodies.

HERON. Don't call them disgusting. Mine's not disgusting. They're very beautiful—our bodies.

FRANK. I call them beastly.

He hesitates a moment: then bursts out again;

Look here, Father, you can preach away at me as you please, but what I say is this: There isn't a man in the world who isn't implicated somehow in this problem. It's natural. It touches everyone of us. If not in deed, then in word: if not in word, then in thought. There's not a man living who is really clean.

HERON. You're a liar, my boy: I am. Many men are. Millions of them. But they don't always write books or plays.

FRANK. Oh, all right, if I'm a liar . . .

He makes to move away, but returns for one last attack;

Good God! How do they manage it? What do they do? What's their secret?

HERON. Abstinence, prayer, clean habits, a busy life, zest in the world, self-reverence, reverence for God, for others, the worship of woman, and—pity. God does the rest.

FRANK *remains silent at last.*

And now, let me ask *you*—one thing. What leprous poison was it in your heart, made you take up this stand today?

FRANK. Oh, it doesn't matter.

He turns away, and leans heavily against the mantelpiece.

HERON. I'd like to hear, my boy. Tell me.

But he remains silent.

Frank. Didn't you hear me?

FRANK. Yes, I heard you, all right.

HERON. Then, what was it?

FRANK (*in a low voice, his back still towards his father*). What's the use? You know well enough, without my telling you.

HERON. My boy, I'm waiting. And God knows, I love you.

The boy turns, facing his father, a despairing wildness in his eyes;

FRANK. Father . . . against Heaven and before you . . . and am no more worthy . . . no more worthy . . .

He sinks into the arm-chair, broken, burying his face in his hands.

His father goes to him.

NELLIE *is sitting in the chair, left of the table. The* WOMAN *has been standing, motionless, all the time.*

There is a long silence, broken at last by the voice of the WOMAN;

WOMAN. This, then, was what I had to say. My message to you from the underworld. Remember, I am the voice of millions, dead and alive: the voice perhaps of millions yet unborn. Nay, I am more: I am your mother: it may be—even—God.

And now I am going to ask you just one thing. I would like to put this question to you and to every young girl in the world.

NELLIE. What is it?

WOMAN. What are you going to do about it?

NELLIE. I don't know. I am in darkness. Tell me.

WOMAN. I will.

First then, your innocence. Cherish it, keep it unspotted—within, mind you, deep within; and let it grow. Seek wisdom and understanding with it. Don't be content any longer to be babies, playthings, dreaming dolls. Grow up. Learn to be.

Next: save your men. The men around you, the men you have to do with, everyone of them. Even the worst.

NELLIE. Yes, but how?

WOMAN. Let them know what women are.

NELLIE. Oh, I see: I begin to understand.

WOMAN. Then, when the time comes, *marry*. Refuse to be *married*. Don't let them give you away in darkness. Marry in daylight. Ask: ascertain: don't be put off with lies. And one thing, above all: don't marry an unclean man. Help, pity, if you can; but don't marry him. Don't foul your precious body: it isn't your own: don't hand on unclean blood to your children. Remember, thou shalt do no murder—body or soul.

NELLIE. Oh, but I could never think of marrying. It seems to me as if marriage could never look beautiful again.

WOMAN. Ask him.

She points to JOHN HERON.

NELLIE. Oh, Father! . . .

HERON. My child, marriage is God's also. It is His sacrament. But the grace of it must be striven for, attained: like saintliness, like —like any other work of art. The true marriages of the world do not drop down from Heaven, ready made: they come in dream, in vision, to the seeking soul: they call for sacrifice, for will, for effort: they must be laboured for, if you want them here on earth. Like religion: like social order: like art.

WOMAN. And last: one last thing for pity's sake I beg you . . .

NELLIE. Go on. I will.

WOMAN. Reach down the lily whiteness of your gentle hands, and lift us from the mire.

NELLIE *kisses her. The* WOMAN *becomes beautiful like something sanctified.*

And now, good-bye.

She is about to put on her hat, when NELLIE *cries out in an agony of tenderness;*

NELLIE. Oh, what was it, what power from God was it, that drew my heart to yours? Why should I be chosen for such a tenderness as this?

WOMAN. Because of God's greatest miracle of loveliness on earth.

NELLIE. Because of what? What loveliness?

WOMAN. Because of your innocence—your white soul. And then also, you are my child. Not only his: not only your mother's; but mine: everybody's: the world's. Yes, you shall be that henceforward, down the days . . .

And that is why you have had to hear this terrible thing.

She puts on her hat, mechanically, her eyes still fixed on the girl.

Good-bye. I shall remember you.

NELLIE. I cannot speak. I am dumb. I don't know how to name you: how to think of you . . .

WOMAN. Think of me as of something dead and buried. Perhaps risen again, or rising . . . Who knows? Good-bye.

She goes out softly. Shortly after, the street door is heard closing quietly behind her.

NELLIE *wakes from a kind of stupor, and makes a movement towards the door.*

HERON. Where are you going, Nellie?

NELLIE. Up there. To my little room. I want to speak to Someone. It's Someone, I don't think I've ever spoken to before.

HERON. Whom?

NELLIE. The Mother of God.

She goes out, a strange new thought in her mind.

There is silence in the room for a short space. Nothing is heard but the ticking of the clock in the corner. Then FRANK *rises from the arm-chair, where he has been sitting with his face buried in his hands all this time.*

FRANK. Father, I'm going back again tonight. I'm ashamed. I can't stay here, now.

He goes up the room, puts on his coat, and gets his hat and bag.

I'll write to you tomorrow.

HERON. Do, Frank.

They join hands for a moment. FRANK *goes to the door, hesitates, and turns;*

FRANK. Oh, I feel like a beast, a brute beast: all the man of me turned into a beast.

HERON. Well, that's as it should be, my boy. Yet even a beast may be made the beginning of a man.

FRANK. But what can I do? What can a fellow do, who has once . . . A fellow like me?

HERON. Repent. Cleanse your ways. Turn to God.

FRANK *bows his head and goes out.*

JOHN HERON *stands thinking. Then he goes to the fireplace and lights his pipe: turns up the room and looks at his wife's portrait: returns to the table and blows out the guttering candle. Pauses, irresolute; and then goes over to the piano: sits down and relieves his agony of feeling by finishing the Intermezzo from the point where he left off.*

On the very last note, the CURTAIN *descends.*

END

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LIBRARY,
BERKELEY

THIS BOOK IS DUE ON THE LAST DATE
STAMPED BELOW

Books not returned on time are subject to a fine of 50c per volume after the third day overdue, increasing to $1.00 per volume after the sixth day. Books not in demand may be renewed if application is made before expiration of loan period.

JUL 19 1921

NOV 12 1921

MAR 24 1923

OCT 29 1923

JUL 16 1924

JUL 6 1926

SEP 7 1926

JAN 29 1928

APR 25 1928

AUG 26 1930

JAN 30 1929

FEB 12 1988

JAN 13 1989

LIBRARY USE ONLY

APR 20 2000

CIRCULATION DEPT.

20m-11,'20

30m-6,'14

~~YC 45642~~
YC 45643
U.C. BERKELEY LIBRARIES
C006223792
259891